

USSR/SUBMARINES DONALDSON: The Soviets themselves are increasing their own activity in northern waters, and as John McWethy reports, there is nothing of a civil nature about it.

MCWETHY: ABC News has learned that the Soviet Union is making greater and greater use of the Arctic polar icecap under which to hide its ballistic missile submarines and as a route toward slipping its subs back and forth between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Intelligence sources say the Soviets have increased their deployments of the newer Delta ballistic missile submarines off the U.S. coast in the last year, and they have made far heavier use of the polar routes. Part of the reason: the U.S. is not able to keep track of the Soviet submarines as well when they are under the ice. The ice blocks U.S. surface ships and aircraft from monitoring the submarines. A second reason, the Soviet Delta force of about three dozen boats is being so heavily used now that in order to keep them on station off the U.S. coast it is sometimes necessary for the Soviets to shift submarines between the Atlantic and Pacific fleets in a hurry. The polar route is ideal. The Deltas are equipped with ballistic nuclear missiles that could be fired from off the U.S. coast or from the Arctic waters and would, at a range of 4,000 miles, hit almost any target in America. As the Soviets have increased their presence in the polar region, the U.S. has been doing much the same, keeping track of the Soviet vessels with American Los Angeles-class attack submarines and hiding some of the U.S. Navy's missile boats to see how well the Soviets do at tracking them. All of the Soviets' newest ballistic missile submarines are equipped with reinforced hulls and conning towers for punching through the ice. The U.S. is also moving in that direction realizing that submarine warfare of the future will increasingly involve the ability to operate under the ice. John McWethy, ABC News, the Pentagon.